

Population, household and family in Ravensberg (Westphalia): agriculture and linen production – their interlacing and their dynamic in a period of preindustrial expansion

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current research

POPULATION, HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

IN RAVENSBERG (WESTPHALIA)

AGRICULTURE AND LINEN PRODUCTION - THEIR INTERLACING AND THEIR DYNAMIC IN A PERIOD OF PREINDUSTRIAL (1) EXPANSION (1750-1850)

1) THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

In the last few years, the discussion of domestic production in pre-industrial society has been revitalized by a new concept called protoindustrialisation. (2) Independently of the question whether or not this word is a fortunate creation (3), the concept itself has proved to be theoretically quite useful. Our research project is intended to be an empirical study of the kind that is urgently needed to lend substance to the concept and to further theoretical discussion.

As our point of departure we consider the agrarian and industrial dynamic of the period 1750-1850 not as a preliminary of the industrial revolution, but as a self-contained socioeconomic system. This approach results from our main thesis: There is a two-way interaction between the agrarian and industrial dynamic in the period studied.

1) The increase of population based on domestic production gives rise to a strong urge - as is well known - to improve and augment food production.

2) An expanding agriculture may give a stimulus to start or to increase domestic production. This needs some explanation: On well organized and expanding farms and manors the demand for labour is much greater in summer than in winter. If one has many year-round servants, one has a high expenditure for under-employed personnel in winter; if one adjusts the number of servants to the need of the winter season, there will be too much work for them in the summer. The problem has been solved in premodern agriculture in several different ways: by seasonal farm servants, by day-labourers, by migrant workers (migrating from town to country, from rural region to rural region), and - as in Ravensberg - by the development of domestic production in winter.

Our research project is a study of the two-way interaction just described. Thus it is a study of a particular type of dynamic economy in preindustrial times, which is characterized by a strong interlacing of agriculture and domestic production. This type is wholly distinct from a mainly industrial expansion - as studied by Mendels in Flanders (4) - and from a mere intensification of agriculture - as in the East Elbian noble estates.

That interlacing type of economy contains a threefold dynamic:

- the genuine dynamic of domestic production, nourished by the constantly increasing demand by the international textile market and by world trade.
- the genuine agrarian dynamic, founded on the need to supply food to urban or rural populations nearby or abroad.
- the dynamic resulting from the interlacing of the two dynamics mentioned before.

Ravensberg has been chosen as the area of investigation, because it is a good example of that interlacing type of economy with its threefold dynamic. Good natural conditions (soil, humidity) in the region north-east of the Teutoburger Wald made it possible to establish a robust agriculture. These conditions helped in particular to cultivate a very fine quality of flax which made it possible to establish a high standard linen production.

2) THE PROJECT AND ITS ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

The project is part of a wider field of study chosen by a group of early modern historians on the faculty of history and philosophy at Bielefeld University. (5) The region of eastern Westphalia is studied from the point of view of social and economic history and special care is taken to identify socially or economically homogeneous sub-regions and their relationship to political and administrative boundaries.

The government of Nordrhein-Westfalen has granted support for the project which is intended to last two years. It is directed by D. Ebeling, W. Mager and T. Schuler. (6) It concentrates on yarn production and its market. (7) We selected for particular study the yarn producing district Spenge (studied by W. Mager, M. Klimkeit and C. Reinders). This quantitative case study is presented in greater detail below. In addition to the Spenge study we investigate by qualitative and quantitative methods the demographical, social and economic structures of the nearby town of Herford, which was a centre for marketing the yarn (studied by M. Goerke). Also we explain by mainly qualitative methods the position of this particular economic system within the world trade in linen (studied by A. Flügel). A further study is devoted to the investigation of the economic and social sub-regions; this is done by collecting and comparing aggregated structural data of the communities in Ravensberg and in the adjoining districts (studied by O. Eimer).

In the Spenge case study a wide variety of quantitative sources is being used: parish registers, tax rolls, census data, listings of tenants and their duties, tenants' contracts, registers of landed property and mortgages, records of the participants in the 1848 revolt, taxation of land and houses (as a result of the commutation of seigniorial obligations), results of the partition of the common land, files of the institutions for social aid. Every listing is recorded separately. We use a small portable computer with a monitor structured by software schedules. These schedules are programmed to check immediately the (previously defined) acceptability of the entries. The data is recorded on floppy discs which are compatible with the installations of the computing centre at our university.

The data is analysed there (on a TR 440) by statistical packages (SPSS) and our own programs. The parish records, in particular, are recorded according to the new historical package CLIO.(8) This will enable us to reconstitute families and family connections by machine. The family reconstitution will form the basis for a detailed demographic study of the Spenge population. In addition, the project is intended to contribute something to historical demography by embedding the demographic data in its social and economic context. The social and economic analysis will be deepened by interpreting the single persons mentioned in the lists within the context of their family. It will be necessary, therefore, to link the data of the different files according to the name of the person ("person reconstitution"). In a similar way we shall collect data from the different files according to the location of the house ("site reconstitution"). These methods will enable us to approach quantitatively central problems such as the family connection between farmers and tenants or the family cycles of the old and the new type tenants. So far no quantitative approach to these problems has appeared in the literature. One outcome of the Spenge case study will be therefore, to reconstruct three different systems of social and economic interaction:

- the family as the smallest unit of living, working and planning,
- the "extended farm" (the complex of the peasant's farm and its dependencies),
- the community in its social structure and its topographic distribution.

The analysis on all three levels will lead to an elaborate and precise distinction of the different social groups and furthermore it will help to establish their particular patterns of interaction.

3) FIRST RESULTS

The rural population developed in a continuous process of internal differentiation. In the first half of the 19th century one can distinguish a small group of big old farms, the so called "Kolonate", producing far above their own consumption. The other landowning farms differed much from one another according to their property and juridical state. By far the largest part of the population (up to three quarters) consisted of the so called "Heuerlinge" (labour tenants). These were non-landowning families, each of whom had a contract with a farmer who rented them a cottage (usually only half a cottage) and a parcel of land on which the tenant grew vegetables or flax. The labour tenants were obliged to work on the farmer's land anytime he called them, but they were paid for this service. In contrast to this quasi-feudal dependency there developed in the first half of the 19th century a more modern type of contract in which the farmer rented only lodgings. Whereas the former type of labour tenant was able to produce linen only part time, the latter, more common type had to rely exclusively on his spinning or weaving, a fact that exposed him strongly to trade cycles and finally to the complete collapse caused by mechanization abroad.

This socioeconomic development led to two steps of modernization in the agrarian system. The first step was the partition of the common land. This was a result of the strong pressure on the common land caused by the increase of the labour tenants. It is therefore not astonishing that in this region the partition of the common land was

started and completed earlier than elsewhere. The second step was the commutation of seignorial obligations, which abolished the feudal restraints that were opposed to a market economy.

Even a political issue, a rural revolt in 1848, can be explained in detail by an analysis of the social and economic conditions of the participants. Therefore our topic gives us an opportunity to connect two often distinct approaches: the history of political events and the history of socio-economic structures.

The current state of research is documented in a paper presented at a colloque of the CRH/Paris and of our Faculty. (9) Another preliminary paper has been prepared for the section A 2 of the 8. International Economic History Congress in Budapest. (10) The theoretical considerations are developed particularly in an article in 'Geschichte und Gesellschaft'. (11) The final results of the 'yarn project' will be published in 1983 (12) although research on the topic is likely to extend beyond that date.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 In this paper the term "industrial" refers to the industrialisation of the late 18th and the 19th century, which is characterised by the use of capital and labour in factories.
- 2 See: F. F. Mendels, *Industrialization and Population Pressure in XVIIIth Century Flanders*, Ph. D. University of Wisconsin 1969 (MS); *Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process*, in: *Journal of Economic History*, 32 (1972), S. 241-261; *Les temps de l'industrie et les temps de l'agriculture. Logique d'une analyse régionale de la Proto-Industrialisation*, in: *Revue du Nord*, Nr. 248, Bd. 63 (1981), S. 21-33. See also: P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung. Gewerbliche Warenproduktion auf dem Land in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus*, Göttingen 1977.
- 3 The term contains an implicit reference to the later industrialisation and disregards the agrarian dynamics.
- 4 cf. note 2.
- 5 Two colleagues are studying the neighbouring state Lippe; see: N. Bulst, J. Hoock, *Volkszählungen in der Grafschaft Lippe. Zur Statistik und Demographie in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert*, in: N. Bulst, J. Goy, J. Hoock (Hrsg.), *Familie zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Studien zur Geschichte der Familie in Deutschland und Frankreich vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (= *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft*, Bd. 48), Göttingen 1981, S. 57 - 86.
- 6 Bigger quantitative research projects tend - as experience shows - to a functional and hierarchical division of labour that is stronger than usual. Whereas it is not useful to deny the need for functional specialisation, it is useful to question the 'vertical' principle. We tried therefore to establish a more 'horizontal' division of

- labour, i.e. every participant has got to take care of every step of gaining, handling and interpreting his data.
- 7 The linen producing district is centered around Bielefeld. A few of these villages are studied in detail by Schlumbohm (see note 2).
 - 8 Developed by Thaller in Göttingen (Max-Planck-Institute).
 - 9 W. Mager, Haushalt und Familie in protoindustrieller Gesellschaft: Spenge (Ravensberg) während der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts - eine Fallstudie, in: Familie ... (see note 5), S. 141 - 180.
 - 10 W. Mager, Gesellschaftsformation im Übergang: Agrarisch-heimgewerbliche Verflechtung und ökonomisch-soziale Dynamik in Ravensberg während der Frühen Neuzeit und im Vormärz (16. Jahrhundert bis Mitte 19. Jahrhundert), Budapest 1982.
 - 11 W. Mager, Protoindustrialisierung und agrarisch-heimgewerbliche Verflechtung in Ravensberg während der Frühen Neuzeit - Studien zu einer Gesellschaftsformation im Übergang -, in: GG 8 (1982).
 - 12 Probably as a separate volume of the series Forschungsberichte des Landes NRW.

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